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TAGS: PREL VT
SUBJECT: HOLY SEE: CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER BLAIR

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, Deputy Chief of Mission,
EXEC, State.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. During a June 3 conversation with Ambassador Rooney, UK PM Blair commented on his efforts to reach out to British Muslims and on several trends in Europe of great concern to the Holy See. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador spoke with Prime Minister Blair at length at a small luncheon hosted June 3 by British ambassador Campbell, following Blair's call earlier that day on Pope Benedict XVI. The following observations from that lunch may be of interest to UK-watchers.

¶3. (C) Blair was very interested in discussing religion with the prominent American and British clergy at the table (Cardinal William Levada, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop Michael Miller). They also talked, as the pope often does, of the trend in Europe toward late marriage, high divorce rates, falling birth rates, and secularism; and the grave implications of these trends for popular values, prospects for the unification of Christian denominations, and health of the Catholic Church. Blair also asked a few questions about Catholic theology. Ambassador commented on the relatively healthy state of Catholicism, and religion in general, in the United States.

¶4. (C) Blair discussed measures he's taken to build bridges to Muslims in the wake of the London bombings, including moves to desegregate Muslim enclaves, and prospects for achieving a moderation of Islam in the near future. Ambassador noted the difficulty faced by any subset of peoples living in one country but feeling psychologically and emotionally disconnected from its original national identity, and the problems that ensued in the host country. Blair picked up on the point to begin a discussion of moderate forces and countries in the Islamic world, and the prospects for them to grow. He asked why American Muslims are apparently less militant than in Europe, to which the ambassador responded (as Pope Benedict put it to him earlier) that our "tradition of assimilation" of peoples has to have something to do with it.

ROONEY